

# **METAL IONS IN BIOLOGY AND MEDICINE**

## **LES IONS MÉTALLIQUES EN BIOLOGIE ET EN MÉDECINE**

Volume 4

Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium  
on Metal Ions in Biology and Medicine held in  
Barcelona (Catalonia), Spain, on May 19-22, 1996

Quatrième Symposium International sur les Ions  
Métalliques en Biologie et en Médecine,  
Barcelona (Catalogne), Espagne, 19-22 mai 1996

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3987-5FE V.13A5*



The first volume of this series was published in May 1990  
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The third volume of this series was published in May 1994  
Eds. Ph. Collery, L.A. Poirier, N.A. Littlefield, J.-C. Étienne

Editions John Libbey Eurotext  
127, avenue de la République, 92120 Montrouge, France  
Tél. : (1) 46.73.06.60 – Fax : (1) 40.84.09.99

John Libbey and Company Ltd  
13, Smiths Yard, Summerley Street, London SW 18 4HR, England  
Tél. : (01) 947.27.77

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Via L. Spallanzani, 11  
00161 Rome, Italy  
Tél. : (06) 862.289

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ISBN 2-7420-0130-1

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## **Meconium analysis using AAS for screening the intrauterine exposure to heavy metals in an ecological disaster region**

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**Abstract.** To determine whether the heavy metal concentrations in meconium originating from an ecological disaster region ( Upper Silesia, PL) are significantly higher in comparison with samples from rural areas concentrations of lead, cadmium, zinc and copper were determined in two collections of 27 and 26 meconium samples using AAS. The mean concentrations (Std Dev) of metals in the exposed group were as follows: Pb 8.1(2.63) ng/g, Cd 7.9(2.49) ng/g, Cu 15.3(5.2) µg/g, Zn 67(20.6) µg/g; in the control group: Pb 4.7(1.44) ng/g, Cd 5.0(1.62) ng/g, Cu 15.2(5.34) µg/g, Zn 68(16.8) µg/g. Very significant statistically differences in mean concentrations of lead and cadmium between the populations were detected ( $p < 0.05$ ). No difference was shown in mean concentrations of copper and zinc between the groups.

### **Introduction.**

One of the materials that seem to be very useful in determination the intrauterine exposure to heavy metals is meconium. The reasons are as follows:

- meconium is easy available
- it is present at the age when foetus is very sensitive to the negative influence of toxic elements
- it is located on the foetal side of the presumable ' placental barrier'
- as method of screening the intrauterine exposure to drugs and smoking proved to be superior when comparing with urine analysis[1].

The review of literature revealed no case of using meconium for screening the intrauterine exposure to heavy metals. Presently placenta[2,3], umbilical cord blood and urine are the usual samples on which neonatal heavy metal burden is performed. Comparing with urine meconium is much easier to collect and reflects a longer period of exposure in utero[1] than both urine and umbilical cord blood do. This is why we chosen in the present study meconium samples as the material for screening the intrauterine exposure to heavy metals in ecologically endangered region that Upper Silesia is.

### **Material and methods.**

The exposed material was the collection of 27 meconium samples from appropriate for gestational age, term healthy newborns, aged 1 day, born in Świętochłowice, Upper Silesia, PL, who gave meconium on the first day of life and whose mothers were neither exposed to heavy metals by occupation nor were ill or taking medications during pregnancy. The 26 samples of the control group met all the above criteria but lived in Lubelskie (clean rural area).

The samples (approx. 15g each) were frozen and stored at -20°C in acid washed polyethylene tubes. The mineralisation of the samples was carried out with the

concentrated nitric acid and perhydrol (suprapure grade, E.Merck, Darmstadt,D) in MLS 1200 MEGA microwave furnace (Milestone, I). All glassware and plastic tips were cleaned by solution for 24h in 25% nitric acid. Water was deionized and then double distilled in a quartz apparatus. Pb, Cd, Cu and Zn solutions Tritisol grades from E. Merck (Darmstadt, D) were used as the standard solutions. The elements were determined by graphite furnace atomic absorption spectroscopy (GFAAS ) using Perkin Elmer Model 5000 spectrometer with the deuterium arc background correction. Lwow platforms were used as well. Argon was applied as neutral gas.

## Results and conclusions.

Mean concentrations (Std Dev) of metals in meconium:

Group/Metal	Pb[ng/g]	Cd[ng/g]	Cu[μg/g]	Zn[μg/g]
Exposed	8.1(2.63)	7.9(2.49)	15.3(5.2)	67(20.6)
Control	4.7(1.44)	5.0(1.62)	15.2(5.34)	68(16.8)
t-test for independent samples	t value=5.63 df=51 p=0.000001 F-ratio var.=3.32 p var=0.004	t value=5.08 df=51 p=000005 F-ratio var.=2.36 p var=0.035	t value=0.077 df=51 p=0.94 F-ratio var.=1.05 p var=0.89	t value=0.34 df=51 p=0.73 F-ratio var.=1.51 p var=0.30

When comparing the levels of heavy metals in meconium samples coming from industrial and rural areas a significant statistically differences in mean concentrations of lead and cadmium between the populations were detected ( $p < 0.05$ ). Since both the populations were very homogenous when taking into account factors considered to be confounders we conclude that the differences are due to the differences in environmental exposures to these elements. No difference was shown in mean concentrations of copper and zinc between the populations. There is no proof that the environmental exposure to these two elements is different for the populations.

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